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## A Priori Testimony Revisited

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Let ‘A Priori Testimony’ be the thesis, introduced and defended by Tyler Burge (1993, 1997, 1999), that there’s a priori knowledge by testimony—more precisely: that at least some of our actual testimonial knowledge is a priori. How does Burge argue this? In large part, by giving a positive account of testimonial warrant and knowledge that sustains it: an account that implies the thesis, and purports to explain how it could be true. Burge’s case for A Priori Testimony, then, rests heavily on the plausibility of his positive account.

In previous work I contested the plausibility of that account (Malmgren 2006). One of the problems I identified is specific to it; one is more general—it arises, it seems, on any model of the epistemology of testimony on which A Priori Testimony comes out true.

Ram Neta has recently responded to the part of my criticism that targets Burge’s account in particular (Neta 2010). In this paper I argue that Neta’s response is inadequate. I also develop my second—more general—objection a little further. In the course of doing so, I discuss the prospects for vindicating A Priori Testimony in a different way—a way that, at least at first sight, looks more promising than Burge’s: with appeal to (what I call) the ‘Fast Track Model’ of testimony. But, I argue, this strategy faces hard challenges of its own.

The paper is organized as follows: in §1, I restate the key components of Burge’s positive account. In §2, I summarize—and further clarify my previous objections to it. In §3, I reply to Neta. In §4, I introduce and examine the Fast Track Model.

### 1.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1 *The Proof Case*

Two suggestive analogies may explain why A Priori Testimony even seems worth taking seriously; here, let me just mention one: the analogy with relatively uncontroversial cases of ‘perception-triggered’ a priori warrant or knowledge—cases where such warrant or knowledge is acquired in part by means of diagrams, formulae or proofs (cf. 1993, 480; 1997, 37).<sup>2</sup> Your specific perceptual experience of, say, a written representation of a certain logical proof may help you *access* a warrant—an independently existing, a priori warrant—for believing a certain logical or mathematical theorem; perhaps a warrant that you wouldn’t, or even couldn’t, otherwise come to have. Your experience can do this without, as it were, ‘contaminating’ the a priori status of that warrant. If the warrant is

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated, all the references in this section are to works by Burge.

<sup>2</sup> See my 2006, §9, for some discussion of the other analogy—with so-called ‘preservative memory’. (See also Christensen & Kornblith 1997; Lawlor 2002.)

strong enough, and other things are equal, you may even come to know the theorem—know it a priori—as a result.

This kind of case provides one of the clearest illustrations there are, of the merely causal, triggering, or warrant-*enabling*—as opposed to the justifying, or warrant-*conferring*—role of perception. It's hard to give a principled account of the distinction between these two roles, but at least we have a paradigm, in cases like this—a paradigm that we think we understand.<sup>3</sup> By assimilating testimonial warrant and knowledge to this paradigm, Burge may tempt us to think that we understand how it, too, could be a priori. Perhaps the perceptual states and processes that are involved in the production or sustenance of testimonial beliefs only play a triggering role, in at least some cases: they facilitate our access to independently existing, a priori warrants. It's a suggestive thought.

In the end, however, Burge's model of the epistemology of testimony doesn't quite back up the suggestive thought (that certain testimony cases are like *that*). There's a sense in which the model 'gives us more than we bargained for'—if what we bargained for was that thought. The recognition that specific perceptual experiences can and sometimes do play a triggering role doesn't *per se* commit us to expanding the domain of the a priori beyond standard limits. (Indeed, it's compatible with highly restrictive conceptions of that domain—e.g. as including only contents that are analytically true.) On Burge's account of testimony, however, the domain is *radically* expanded. Granted: the domain of a priori *knowledge* stays the same. But the domain of a priori warrant now includes *that zebras are larger than red poppies, that Bettie likes chocolate cake, that many children have imaginary friends*—and any number of other, 'deeply' contingent, propositions (cf. Evans 1985). This isn't yet an objection to the view, but it's worth taking note of.

## 1.2 Burge's account

Burge is a pluralist about epistemic warrant: he holds that it comes in (at least) two varieties—'justification' is cognitively accessible to the agent (perhaps even as such: as warrant), whereas 'entitlement' isn't (1993, 458–9; 2003, 504).<sup>4</sup> The a priori/a posteriori distinction applies to both types of warrant, and a warrant is a priori if "neither sense experience nor perceptual belief constitute nor enhance its [warranting] force" (1997, 21). Knowledge is a priori, in turn, when it's "underwritten by an a priori justification or entitlement that needs no further justification or entitlement to make it knowledge" (1993, 458). And warrant or knowledge that's not a priori is a posteriori. Burge also holds that at least some a priori warrant and knowledge is empirically defeasible (1993, 460–1). As will emerge, two warrants of this type—two a priori, but empirically defeasible, warrants—take center stage in his vindication of A Priori Testimony: the testimonial

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<sup>3</sup> If Kitcher 1987, 2000, or Williamson 2007 is right, we may not. But I won't engage their arguments here. (See my 2012, §9 for some discussion of Williamson's.)

<sup>4</sup> Nothing here turns on how exactly this distinction is precisified. For discussion, see Casullo 2007; Silins 2006.

recipient's default *pro tanto* entitlements to 'rely on her understanding', and to 'rely on the rationality of her source'.<sup>5</sup>

In testimony, a propositional content is asserted—or in some other way 'presented-as-true'—by a source, to a recipient. (There may of course be multiple sources and/or recipients, but nothing here turns on this.) As Burge conceives of assertion, it requires a linguistic action—specifically, the spoken or written utterance of a suitable declarative sentence—but it's unclear whether that goes for all presentations-as-true, or whether (say) the shaking of one's head, or the drawing of a figure in the sand, qualifies in certain circumstances. More generally, it's unclear how broad the category of presentations-as-true is supposed to be: Burge explicitly includes obvious presuppositions and conventional implicatures, but he leaves it open how to generalize from there (1993, 482, fn. 20, 21). For immediate purposes, however, we can bracket this complication, and focus on testimonial acts that do involve assertions—assertions that (let's suppose with Burge) are all expressed by means of declarative sentences. (I'll use 'saying', 'telling', and 'testifying'—in lieu of 'presentation-as-true'—as umbrella terms: to designate any communicative act that's a potential source of testimonial warrant and knowledge.<sup>6</sup>)

A given source may or may not have warrant for believing the content she asserts—if she does, and if her attempt to testify is otherwise successful, that warrant is passed on to the recipient: it's 'preserved' in the testimony (1993, 466, 486). But it's not *required* that the source has warrant, and that this warrant is preserved, for the recipient to have warrant—or warranted belief—by that source's testimony. For the recipient to *know*, the source must have warrant: indeed, the source must in turn *know* what she asserts—and she must know in some other way than by testimony. (At least there must be a source with non-testimonial knowledge somewhere down the chain; 1993, 485–6, fn. 24. I'll treat this qualification as understood.) But all it takes, for a recipient to have testimonial warrant, is that her two default *pro tanto* entitlements are in place: her entitlement to rely on her understanding—henceforth: the 'u-entitlement'—and her entitlement to rely on the rationality of her source—the 'r-entitlement'. And all it takes for those entitlements to be in place is that she lacks (undefeated) defeaters.<sup>7</sup>

The two entitlements can be in place—remain undefeated—even if what the source asserts is distinct from what it *seems* to the recipient that she asserts. (In such cases the testimonial warrant is a warrant to believe the 'seeming' content.) On Burge's picture, then, testimonial warrant doesn't require correct identification, by the recipient, of the asserted content: it's compatible with her mishearing or misunderstanding what her source said. In fact, it doesn't even require that a content—any content—*is* (or was)

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<sup>5</sup> Burge uses 'a priori' and 'non-empirical' interchangeably; likewise for 'a posteriori' and 'empirical'. I follow that usage. And I treat 'warrant', 'evidence' and (good, epistemic) 'reason' as equivalent. When nothing hinges on the difference, I move freely between 'S has warrant to believe/for believing that *p*' (*propositional* warrant) and 'S is warranted in believing/has warranted belief that *p*' (*doxastic* warrant). Most of the time I write as if belief, as well as warrant, is an all-or-nothing affair—this, too, is a simplification that nothing turns on.

<sup>6</sup> In section 3 we return to the question what, besides assertion, plausibly falls in the umbrella category.

<sup>7</sup> A little more precisely: all it takes is that she's a linguistically competent, rational agent, who lacks defeaters. According to Burge, the source of the u-entitlement is the reliability of our linguistic competence, whereas the r-entitlement 'comes with being a rational agent'; 1993, 467; 1997, 31; 1999, 233. (For a fuller picture, cf. 2003.)

asserted, by the ostensible source or by anyone else: a vivid enough illusion or hallucination, as of someone saying that *p*, may other things equal provide one with testimonial warrant to believe that *p* (1997, 24–6).

Testimonial *knowledge* is more demanding, in these respects as well: it does require there to be a source, and it requires the recipient to correctly identify both content and force of that source’s speech-act—say, its being an assertion that *p* (1993, 480, fn. 19). It doesn’t, however, require her to correctly identify the *words* that figure in the source’s utterance. And it’s unclear whether it requires her to identify the source (either *as* her source, or as anything else—under any other mode of presentation). It’s also unclear what the precise relation is between the correct identification—or, in Burge’s preferred phrase, ‘correct understanding’—of a given token speech-act, and the *knowledge* or *warranted belief* that a speech-act with that content and force is (or was) performed. We’ll return to this.

The two default entitlements form part of the recipient’s ‘proprietary’ warrant to believe a given proposition. As already indicated, they’re not only jointly sufficient but individually necessary for (her to have) testimonial warrant; hence they’re necessary for testimonial knowledge as well. In cases where both entitlements are in place, and the source in turn has warrant, the source’s warrant and the recipient’s proprietary warrant together combine to form the recipient’s ‘extended’ warrant (1993, 485–6).

Now, for the recipient to have *a priori* testimonial warrant or knowledge, her default entitlements must not just be in place—they must be *a priori*. But Burge argues that they’re indeed *a priori*, as long as two further conditions are met: first, the recipient doesn’t depend on any empirical defeater-defeaters (for her entitlements to be in place)—either she has no defeaters, or her defeaters are defeated by *a priori* defeater-defeaters—and, second, her understanding of the target utterance is *intellectual* (1997, 22).

What’s intellectual understanding? Burge tells us that:

[...] it is understanding whose exercise in particular instances does not require in those instances perceptual warrant for the application of what is understood. A first approximation elaboration is that it is *conceptual* understanding that does not require, in thinking and understanding an intentional content, perceptual warrant for the *de re* application of some aspect of the content. (1997, 21, italics original.)

Elsewhere it’s further explicated as understanding that only depends on our “*standing* linguistic abilities” or “standing linguistic competence” (1999, 234, italics in original).<sup>8</sup> And Burge takes a very liberal view on what that competence is able to deliver. It *doesn’t*, he grants, suffice to understand utterances of sentences that contain certain context-sensitive expressions: expressions whose understanding (on given occasions of use) require perceptual identification of their referents—paradigmatically: perceptual demonstratives and pure indexicals. Nor does it suffice to recover certain indirect speech-acts: speech-acts that differ in content and/or force from those that constitute the ‘default

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<sup>8</sup> What Burge means by ‘standing linguistic competence’ is at least roughly equivalent to what some have called ‘semantic (or narrow semantic) competence’, ‘knowledge of the meaning of expression-types’, or ‘knowledge of context-invariant meaning.’ (In 1999, ‘comprehension’ is used in lieu of ‘intellectual understanding’.)

readings' of the uttered sentences—paradigmatically: conversational implicatures (1993, 483; 1997, 22; 1999, 234, 245). But, with these two caveats, Burge claims that “[t]he standing mechanism yields an enormous amount of understanding” (1999, 235).

Importantly, it doesn't just yield understanding of *content*, but also, frequently, of *force* (1993, 482; 1997, 22, 44, fn. 3). In particular, our understanding of *assertoric* force is frequently intellectual; that, we're told, is because there's a 'conceptual connection' between assertoric force and declarative mood (1993, 482). And keep in mind that what's at issue here isn't just our understanding of sentence-types—but of specific dated *utterances* (or sentence-tokens). The claim is that your grasp of both content and force of the speech-act that's expressed by a specific dated utterance of, say, 'zebras are larger than red poppies' may well be intellectual—that your standing linguistic competence may suffice to identify *that particular* speech-act as an assertion that zebras are larger than red poppies. (This example is Burge's own; 1997, 22.) Likewise—I presume—for a specific dated utterance of, say, '16 x 78 = 1248', 'Norway was occupied during WWII', 'Bettie likes chocolate cake', or 'many children have imaginary friends'.

For concreteness, let 'AR' (for 'a priori recipient') be a recipient who has what it takes to be a priori u-entitled, and a priori r-entitled: AR's understanding of her source's utterance (or apparent utterance, or apparent source's utterance...) is intellectual, and AR has no undefeated or empirically defeated defeaters. Note that that's already enough to ensure that AR has *some* a priori warrant to believe the content of that utterance—say, that Bettie likes chocolate cake. Whether AR has *all-things-considered* a priori warrant partly depends on the status of the (eventual) warrant that's passed on from her source. It also depends on the status of AR's supplementary warrant, if any: if AR has no supplementary warrant (to believe that content), or if she does but it's a priori as well, the status of AR's all-things-considered warrant is a priori. But if AR has a posteriori supplementary warrant, then, of course, her all-things-considered warrant is a posteriori too.

Suppose that AR falls in the first mentioned category: she has no supplementary warrant at all to believe that Bettie likes chocolate cake. Then the only remaining variable is the status of her source's warrant: if the source has a posteriori warrant, then, again, AR's all-things-considered warrant is a posteriori. But if the source has a priori warrant, AR is in the clear: her all-things-considered warrant is a priori. Likewise if the source has *no* warrant—in that case too, AR is in the clear, since her all-things-considered warrant is exhausted by her default a priori entitlements.

Thus there are—crudely put—at least two different ways to come by all-things-considered a priori warrant by testimony: one is to use a source with a priori warrant; another is to use a source *without* warrant. (A third is to use a merely apparent source, and/or a merely apparent utterance, since, in such cases too, no warrant at all—hence no a posteriori warrant—is preserved in the testimony.) However, Burge tells us, there's only one way to come by a priori *knowledge* by testimony: for that, one needs a source who

herself has—not just warrant, or even a priori warrant—but *a priori knowledge* of the content in question: a priori knowledge that’s not, in turn, testimonial (1993, 486–7).<sup>9</sup>

*AR* has a priori knowledge by testimony, then, just in case there’s indeed a source, the content that *AR* takes that source to assert is the very same content that the source asserts, and the source has a priori, non-testimonial knowledge of that content. The first two conditions, recall, are requirements on testimonial knowledge in general. And the third condition has an interesting consequence: that what we can know a priori by testimony comes apart from what we can have a priori testimonial warrant to believe (cf. 1997, 44 fn. 2). Presumably our sample content is a case in point: *that Bettie likes chocolate cake* can’t be known a priori by testimony, since it can’t be known a priori in any *other*—any non-testimonial—way. So, given that this is by hypothesis the content that’s in question here, *AR* does *not* have a priori testimonial knowledge, however else we fill out the details of the case. At most she has all-things-considered a priori (doxastic) warrant.

The immediate focus in what follows is on warrant—not knowledge. If, as I maintain, it’s not even possible to be in *AR*’s shoes,<sup>10</sup> then, of course, it’s not possible to have a priori knowledge by testimony.

## 2.

### 2.1 Objections (first round)

In Malmgren 2006, I argued that there’s no plausible conception available to Burge of the *object* of the first default entitlement he postulates—no plausible answer to the question “what does the u-entitlement entitle the recipient to *do*?” My argument was, in effect, an argument by elimination: I considered every (minimally feasible) candidate answer I could think of, and criticized each in turn (*ibid.* 212–24). Two of the candidates will be repeated shortly.

Next, I argued that Burge fails to accommodate the presumption that our knowledge of what’s said (‘of the specific type’)—say, your knowledge that Max just said that Bettie likes chocolate cake—plays a certain epistemic role vis-à-vis our testimonial knowledge, and that the failure to do so commits him to a peculiar picture of testimonial recipients’ motivational psychology (*ibid.* 224–30). (But the fundamental point concerns warranted belief—not knowledge. This is made more explicit here, in my restatement of the objection; see §2.2.) The second objection is largely independent of the first. It’s also wider in scope; on the face of it, it arises on any account that sustains A Priori Testimony.

Burge is clear about what the recipient’s *second* default entitlement—the r-entitlement—is a warrant to do (1993, 467–73; 1997, 21): it’s a warrant to accept as true the content of

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it’s enough that there’s a priori non-testimonial knowledge *somewhere* in the chain. Either way, it’s unclear whether this condition is well-motivated—given that Burge’s official reason for requiring knowledge by the source is to preclude *Gettier-cases*; 1993, 486, fn. 24. (For related discussion, see Casullo 2007a.)

<sup>10</sup> At least for agents relevantly like us—without telepathic capacities, ‘thought-injection’ skills or the like. (Cf. the curious example in Burge 1999, 240. It’s not clear to me why we should think that our notion of testimonial warrant/knowledge is even applicable to agents with such radically different means of communication.)

an arbitrary source's assertion (or apparent assertion, or apparent source's assertion...<sup>11</sup>). More simply put: it's a warrant for her to believe *what she was told*, by a given source on a given occasion—say, that Bettie likes chocolate cake. That the recipient must have warrant to believe that content, in order to have testimonial warrant/knowledge, is obviously not controversial—it's not controversial since that's precisely the content she has testimonial warrant to believe, or testimonial knowledge of, if she does.<sup>12</sup>

It's tempting to suppose that the first default entitlement—the u-entitlement—is likewise a warrant for the recipient to *believe* something; specifically: that it's a warrant for her to believe that the given content is (or was) indeed asserted, by the given source on the given occasion. This is tempting since it's *independently* plausible that testimonial warrant and knowledge requires warrant to believe a claim of this sort: that you can't have testimonial warrant to believe *what* you were told (e.g. that Bettie likes chocolate cake) unless you have warrant to believe *that* you were told it, by so-and-so then-and-there (e.g. that Max just said that Bettie likes chocolate cake). So this interpretation makes sense of the alleged necessity of the u-entitlement. It also looks—in at least some places—as though it captures Burge's intent (for instance: Burge 1993, 476; 1999, 235).

The main problem is that it's very hard to see how, if this reading were correct, the u-entitlement could ever be a priori: how anyone (relevantly like us) could have a priori warrant for believing a content like *that Max just said that Bettie likes chocolate cake*. On the face of it, this is no more plausible when, by Burge's criteria, the target utterance is capable of being intellectually understood, than when it isn't (cf. Malmgren, *ibid.* 216). Note also that the worry doesn't rest on any demanding *conceptual* requirements on believing—and, derivatively, on having warrant to believe—the content in question: requirements to the effect that one be able to refer to the time and place of the given assertion under any other mode of presentation than, say, *sometime recently someplace not too far away, right here now*, or *when I was in college*, nor to the source under any other mode of presentation than, say, *my source, the speaker*, or *whoever wrote that book*.

Another option—perhaps, in the end, Burge's preferred option—is that what the u-entitlement entitles the recipient to do is to believe that the given content is (or was) asserted by some source or other, at some point or other. More simply: that it's a warrant for her to believe *that* she was told it—but without any commitment at all as to where, when, and by whom (e.g. that someone or other, at some point or other, and in some way or other, said that Bettie likes chocolate cake). Cf. "What one is entitled to on intellectual grounds is merely, *prima facie*, that a given content is presented as true. One gets *nothing* about the time, form, or circumstances of the assertion." (Burge, 1993, 483; second emphasis added.)

But this suggestion is hardly an improvement on the first: it's no easier to see how anyone could have a priori warrant to believe a content about what's said of this—less committal or specific—type, than a content about what's said of the more specific type.

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<sup>11</sup> This qualification is henceforth treated as understood.

<sup>12</sup> What *is* controversial is that at least part of her overall warrant to believe that content is *default* warrant—and, of course, that it's sometimes a priori.

There are of course several ways (easily available to a typical recipient) to come by *warrant* to believe it—perhaps most obviously: by competent deductive inference from (warranted belief in) a content of the more specific type—but none that, it seems, would or could provide her with a *a priori* warrant to believe it.<sup>13</sup>

And the problem isn't, or not just, that Burge himself fails to give an adequate explanation of how the recipient could have a priori warrant to believe what—on either of these readings—she sometimes, supposedly, does have a priori warrant to believe. (Although that, too, is the case in my view.<sup>14</sup>) It's that there is no adequate explanation in the offing: indeed, we don't even know how to *begin* to explain what needs explaining. That, at any rate, is what I argued in my previous piece (Malmgren, *ibid.* 215–17).

As we'll see, however, this is the point where I'm being challenged by Neta. According to Neta, I overlook<sup>15</sup> a 'perfectly good' explanation; a perfectly good explanation, that is, of how it's possible to have a priori warrant to believe a content about what's said of the less specific type—schematically: *that someone at some point said that p*.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Objections (second round)

Let a 'successful recipient' be an agent who *at least* has doxastic testimonial warrant: who is warranted in believing—and perhaps knows—that *p* by testimony. My second objection to Burge starts with the thought that any such recipient is (also) warranted in believing a content about what's said of the more specific type—schematically: *that her source said that p*.<sup>17</sup> And her warrant for believing that content is inevitably a posteriori.

The next step is that this recipient's (empirically warranted) belief that her source said that *p* plays a *causal-explanatory* role in the formation of her (testimonial warrant) belief that *p*. Loosely put: she believes *what* she's been told at least in part because she believes *that* she's been told it, by so-and-so then-and-there.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Another way is by testimony, but I trust that it's clear why appeal to *that* route would be a non-starter here.

<sup>14</sup> For criticism of Burge's attempt at an explanation, see Malmgren, *ibid.* 217, fn. 40. Note also that his argument for the claim that perception sometimes plays a triggering role vis-à-vis the u-entitlement (Burge 1993, 4xx–xx) doesn't bear directly on the present concern: even if that argument were successful—as I argue that it's not (Malmgren, *ibid.* 201–2)—the most it would show is *that* the u-entitlement is sometimes a priori. The question how it could be remains.

<sup>15</sup> In fact I didn't overlook it, but I dismissed it as a non-starter (Malmgren *ibid.* 217–8, fn. 41).

<sup>16</sup> The remaining options that I offer Burge—that the u-entitlement (just like the r-entitlement) is a warrant to believe that *p*, or that it's a warrant to make a transition—are criticized in *ibid.* §5. There's no need to go over them here.

<sup>17</sup> It's plausible that the requirement is conditional on the possession of certain concepts (cf. *ibid.* 236, n. 79). Like Burge, I assume that the 'seeming' source and assertion are what matters, at least to testimonial warrant.

<sup>18</sup> I write as if what does the causal work is strictly speaking the recipient's *beliefs*, rather than her *warranted* beliefs or *knowledge*, but nothing crucial turns on this. Likewise for various general issues in the metaphysics of causation—e.g. whether mental states of any kind (as opposed to, say, facts or events) are fit to be causal relata—and in the metaphysics of reasons/warrants—e.g. whether reasons are best construed as propositions or as facts. The argument can be restated in your framework of choice.



Third, the belief that her source said that *p* isn't 'any old cause': it has the right kind of content to provide her with a (good, *pro tanto*) *reason*—a warrant, or partial warrant—for believing that *p*. Clearly there's no *deductive* relationship between the contents of these two beliefs, but, I take it, that's not required for a proposition to be a reason to believe another. And I assume that there are many contexts where the content that her source said that *p* isn't a reason—or is a fully defeated reason—for a given agent to believe that *p*. But when that agent is a *successful testimonial recipient*, with respect to *p*, she's in a context where it *is* a reason.<sup>19</sup>

Fourth: that her source said that *p* is a reason that the successful recipient *has*: it's a reason *of hers* to believe that *p*. Perhaps the fact that she believes it, or that she has warrant to do so, is already enough to ensure this. But note that it comes out true also on more stringent views of what it takes to have a reason: views on which doxastic warrant is required. (If she *knows* what's said, it comes out true on even more stringent views.<sup>20</sup>)

A natural way to pull all of this together is by saying that the proposition that her source said that *p* is among the successful recipient's reasons *for believing* that *p*—her *operative* reasons: the reasons-*for-which* she believes that *p*—or, equivalently, that her belief that *p* is at least partly *based* on her belief that the source said that *p*. This, of course, fits nicely with the fact that a typical recipient, if she's the least reflective, may well cite her source having said that *p* as her reason, or one of her reasons, for believing that *p*—e.g. she may respond *that Max just told her so*, when asked how she knows that Bettie likes chocolate cake (or why, for what reason, or on what grounds, she believes it). On this way of pulling things together, she simply comes out right.

But Burge can't avail himself of this, natural picture: it's in tension with A Priori Testimony. If the successful recipient's belief that *p* is based on her empirically warranted belief that her source said that *p*, then her belief that *p* is empirically warranted too (hence, at best, constitutes empirical knowledge). So Burge had better deny that her one belief is based on the other—or, at least: deny that that's the case across the board.

One option here is to grant that what I called the 'natural picture' accurately captures the motivational psychology of the canonical or typical (successful) recipient, but argue that there are exceptions: that at least some successful recipients—importantly: recipients whose testimonial beliefs constitute *knowledge*—differ from the norm in this respect. Another option is to deny that the natural picture captures the structure of the typical—or even any!—successful recipient's reasons and beliefs.

Either way, however, Burge is now in an uncomfortable spot. Take a specific, successful recipient whose belief that her source said that *p* is a cause of her (warranted) belief that *p*, and provides a reason for her to believe that *p*—a recipient who *has* that reason, but whose belief that *p* isn't based on her belief that her source said that *p*. What's the explanation? *Why* is her testimonial belief not based on her belief about what's said?

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<sup>19</sup> I don't think it matters whether we think of the relevant contextual factors as including auxiliary reasons, or only warrant-enablers—conditions that enable the given proposition to constitute a ('complete') reason.

<sup>20</sup> By my lights, however, knowledge of what's said is at most a plausible requirement on testimonial knowledge.

Burge—and, more generally: the A Priori Testimony advocate—owes us an answer to this question. Let me clarify why it's a difficult burden to discharge.

The case as described is structurally similar to the familiar counter-examples—abundant in the literature—to a straightforward causal analysis of the basing-relation (or of operative reasons): cases of 'reason-independent causation'. Various competing diagnoses have been offered of what exactly goes on, or goes wrong, in cases like these—cases where a suitable belief (or other intentional state) figures in the causal explanation of another belief (or other state, or action) without being part of its base. One broad family of diagnoses appeal to the notion of *deviant* causation; another family introduces further, or substitute, conditions on basing.<sup>21</sup>

My challenge to the advocate of A Priori Testimony isn't just a challenge to take a stand in this debate; that would be relatively uninteresting—not because the debate concerns an uninteresting problem, but because it concerns a problem that, at least on the face of it, can be expected to have a solution. Rather, the challenge is to make good on the claim that some cases of testimony—indeed, of testimonial *knowledge*—are cases of reason-independent causation, *whatever* the correct analysis of that phenomenon is. The assimilation has little face-value appeal, as a quick glance at some of the familiar examples should make clear.<sup>22</sup> And it doesn't increase in appeal on any of the extant, available diagnoses.

Suppose the first broad family of diagnoses—diagnoses that appeal to causal deviance—is on the right track; then, to a first approximation, what makes all the familiar cases cases of reason-independent causation is the presence of some kind of *interference mechanism*: a mechanism that interferes with a salient subset of the agent's normal causal-psychological processes, and that's crucially involved in the production of the featured effect.<sup>23</sup> In this framework, the suggestion—the suggestion in need of further defense—is that some such mechanism (or set of mechanisms) is involved, across the relevant range of testimony cases: an interference mechanism that explains why the recipient's belief that *p* isn't based on, although caused by, her belief that her source said that *p*—and that, crucially, doesn't prevent her from knowing that *p* by that source's testimony. What would the mechanism be? At the very least, we need to be provided with more detail. And note that—even at this level of abstraction—the suggestion is quite odd: it's odd to suppose that a prerequisite for a priori warrant and knowledge by testimony is that the testimonial belief be partly explained by the workings of an interference mechanism. Of course, matters are worse if the scope of the suggestion is *typical* testimony.

A competing suggestion, belonging to the other family of views, would be that some higher-level requirement or other on basing has been violated: that, in the cases of interest, the recipient lacks the appropriate attitude—perhaps awareness, belief, or

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<sup>21</sup> For a helpful overview, see Korcz 2010.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Chisholm 1966; Davidson 1973; Plantinga 1993; Lennon 1990.

<sup>23</sup> This gloss—in particular, the notion of normality—obviously needs precisification. (But I don't mean to preclude that, for some agents and effects, an interference mechanism could be statistically dominant.)

warranted belief—to the *status* of the claim that her source said that *p*: its being a reason (for her) to believe that *p*. But this suggestion too is, at best, peculiar: that the only recipient who's able to have a priori testimonial warrant and knowledge is the recipient who, loosely put, *gets her reasons wrong*—who fails to realize that a certain reason to believe that *p*, indeed one of *her* reasons to believe that *p*, is indeed a reason for her to believe that *p*. (Or, if the requisite attitude is warranted belief, who fails to *rationaly* realize this: who lacks warrant altogether to believe it, or who does have warrant but believes it on other—bad—grounds.) And, again, matters are worse if the scope of the suggestion is typical testimony.

Matters are worse, if that's the scope, since it's very implausible that the typical, successful recipient fits either of the above (minimal, theoretical) descriptions.<sup>24</sup> At a more intuitive level: it's implausible that the typical successful recipient's motivational psychology is relevantly similar to that of the agents featured in stock examples of reason-independent causation. The principal problem, however, applies regardless of scope: it's that the suggestion commits us to there being at least some, actual, testimonial recipients whose psychology is relevantly similar to that of such agents—but who nevertheless *know* the target proposition (by testimony). It's by no means obvious how to make good on this suggestion, given that the agents in the stock examples don't even have doxastic *warrant* (where applicable): their beliefs aren't properly based, and so not warranted, even when all other requirements on warranted belief are met.<sup>25</sup>

We return to these considerations in §4.

### 3.

#### 3.1 Neta's Proposal

Neta doesn't address the second objection (just rehearsed). But he offers an interesting reply to the first—*i.e.* to the objection that Burge has no plausible conception available of the object of the u-entitlement: no good answer to the question what it's a warrant to do.

Neta claims that I'm too quick in rejecting the idea that the u-entitlement is a warrant to believe a content about what's said of the less specific type: that someone at some point said that *p*. (Or, in the locution he borrows from Burge: 'that a rational source presented it as true that *p*'.<sup>26</sup>) In response to my complaint about that idea, Neta argues as follows:

[w]hat I'd like to focus on is Malmgren's suggestion [...] that we have no way to explain how it is possible for someone to whom it seems that a rational source has presented it as true that *p* to be *a priori* warranted in believing the contingent proposition that a rational source has presented it as true that *p*. It seems to me that, on the contrary, we have a perfectly good explanation of this, which I'll now outline by means of an example.

<sup>24</sup> I leave counterfactual analyses of the basing-relation (e.g. Swain 1979) out of consideration. On the face of it, they have nothing at all to say about the present case: all relevant counterfactuals hold.

<sup>25</sup> At least: not warranted by the route that's explicit in the description of each case. (Cf. §4.)

<sup>26</sup> The difference in formulation makes no difference. In particular: 'rational' here contrasts with 'arational'—not 'irrational'. (But see Fricker 2006 for a case that Burge in fact equivocates on the notion of rationality at play.)

Suppose that I present it as true that, say, Washington, DC is the capital of the United States. If I do this under normal circumstances, then, while I might not be *a priori* warranted in any particular beliefs concerning the medium by which I presented this proposition as true [...], I can at least be *a priori*, defeasibly warranted in thinking that I have (somehow or other) presented it as true that Washington, DC is the capital of the United States: my warrant for believing this contingent proposition concerning what I have presented as true is of the same sort as my warrant for believing other contingent propositions concerning my communicative intentions, and it is not typically constituted by my sensory or perceptual experiences. It is crucial to recall here that for an agent to present something as true does not require that the agent make any noises or bodily movements: Burge leaves open that an agent can present something as true by means of extra-sensory perception. Indeed, in at least one passage he suggests that judging that *p* is a way of presenting it as true that *p*: “I use the term ‘presentation as true’ to cover more than assertions and *judgments*” (Burge 1993, 482, emphasis added). If this is right, then I can present something to myself as true simply by thinking of it *as true*, i.e., judging that it is true or otherwise affirming its truth in thought.

Now, if I can be *a priori* warranted in thinking that I have presented this proposition as true, then I can also be *a priori* warranted in thinking that I have *been given to understand* this proposition as true. But the following conditional is *a priori*: if I have been given to understand something as true, then a rational source (maybe me, maybe another rational source) has given it to be understood as true, or in other words, has presented it as true. (Neta 2010, 209–210, italics in original.)

The passage continues with the attribution of some further reasoning to the (putative) recipient—reasoning that’s required on Neta’s reconstruction of Burge’s account. But there’s no need to rehearse that here (and nothing turns on the exegetical disagreement). The quoted passage appears to already contain what I’d asked for: an explanation—or at least an explanation sketch—of how an agent, relevantly like us, could have a priori warrant to believe that someone at some point said that *p*. But is it a plausible sketch? And is it applicable to the case of interest? I’ll consider these questions in turn.

On the face of it, the force of Neta’s example essentially depends on the fact that the agent who has the *a priori* warrant is the very same agent who performs the assertion that makes the target claim true (or, at least, that this *seems* to her to be so): the same agent whose ‘saying’—here: *judging*—that *p* makes it true that someone at some point said that *p*. It’s because, but only because, she has warrant for believing that *she* said that *p*, that she has warrant for believing the more general claim. More precisely, the case appears to be a standard case of inferential warrant, in which an agent’s warrant to believe one proposition (here: that someone at some point said that *p*) partly rests on, or derives from, her warrant to believe another (here: that she said that *p*)—a proposition that’s a reason for her to believe the first. On usual assumptions about inferential warrant, her warrant to believe the more general proposition is *a priori* only if her warrant to believe the more specific proposition is. And, indeed, it’s plausible that the latter is *a priori*—provided that *introspective* warrant is *a priori*, at least in the case at hand.

So let’s grant that it is. To further simplify: let’s grant that introspective warrant is *a priori* across the board, and that one can have introspective warrant for believing that one is currently ‘judging that *p*.’<sup>27</sup> (I take this to be equivalent to ‘having a conscious occurrent belief that *p*’.) Now if, as Neta suggests, judging that *p* is just another way of

<sup>27</sup> Nothing controversial is intended by ‘introspective’—all we need is that there’s at least one type of warrant, that’s available to the first person (only), that’s *a priori*, and that at least has the scope indicated in the text. (And we can ignore the possibility that whether it’s available depends on the value of *p*.)

saying that *p*, one thereby has a priori warrant for believing that one is saying that *p*, which transparently entails that someone at some point did. Presumably, this little argument is able to constitute a ‘complete’ inferential justification; *i.e.* one doesn’t need warrant—a priori or a posteriori—for believing any *further* propositions, to have warrant for believing the conclusion of the argument (given warrant to believe the premise).<sup>28</sup> But then, if other things are equal, no a posteriori element is introduced, and so Neta’s character—the agent with (introspective) a priori warrant for believing the premise—has a priori warrant for believing the conclusion too: that someone at some point said that *p*.

It’s unclear whether introspection affords any *other* a priori route to the desired destination. Perhaps it’s possible to have introspective warrant to believe that one, just a moment ago, *intended* to say that *p*. Although intending to say something isn’t itself a way of saying it—not even on the present, highly permissive, conception of sayings—this, too, could plausibly constitute the first step in an (inferential) warrant to believe that someone at some point said that *p*. What’s doubtful, however, is that it could constitute the *only* step—in particular, that there’s a way to ‘move’ from it, to (warrant to believe) the conclusion, without the benefit of any auxiliary *empirical* warrant. (*E.g.* to believe that one usually says what one intends to say, or that one frequently did in the past, or ...) The proposed warrant-structure can be elaborated in a variety of ways, consistent with the rationality of the corresponding transition. But it’s very controversial that it—in contrast to the previous structure—needs no elaboration at all: that it’s complete as it stands. And, on all the obvious ways of elaborating it, the agent has warrant to believe further propositions: warrant that could only be empirical.

Likewise for candidate routes from (introspective warrant to believe) that one *now* intends to say that *p*, that one *remembers* that one said that *p*, that one remembers *that someone at some point said that p*, that one *believes* that someone at some point said that *p*—and so on.<sup>29</sup> In each case, considerable further work is needed to support the claim that it’s possible to rationally move from the suggested starting-point, to the desired end-point, without additional a posteriori warrant on the agent’s part.

As I read it, Neta’s example does not introduce this complication. It does however depend on the permissive conception of sayings. But I’ll go along with that for now.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> That’s to say that a ‘liberal’ analysis of the corresponding warrant-structure is correct. But, strictly speaking, the only analysis that’s ruled out is one on which additional *empirical* warrant is required. (And the brand of ‘conservatism’ on which that’s needed is radical indeed: given the simplicity of the argument under consideration, it’s unclear if that view could recognize any inferential a priori warrant at all.)

<sup>29</sup> In correspondence, Neta suggests a route from it introspectively ‘seeming’ that someone at some point said that *p* (to having a priori warrant to believe that someone at some point did). It’s not clear how exactly the purported seeming-state is supposed to differ from a belief (or memory) state with the same content, but in any case this suggestion falls in the same category as those listed above: in effect, it just transforms my original request—for an explanation of how it’s possible to have a priori warrant to believe the target claim—to a request for an explanation for how the proposed *transition* could be a priori (in the terminology of my 2006, 220–4).

<sup>30</sup> It’s also worth noting that the kind of a priori warrant that the agent has, on my reading of Neta’s case—a partly introspective, inferential, warrant—is most likely not what Burge himself had in mind. (For one thing, it makes the restriction to the contents of utterances that are ‘intellectually understood’ completely mysterious. For another, it jars with his repeated insistence that the warrant at issue is non-inferential—perhaps even with it being an entitlement! See 1997, 30.) But I’m interested in the proposal as a suggestion on Burge’s behalf: one that might be used to amend or modify his account, with a view to vindicating A Priori Testimony.

Next: is the proffered a priori warrant (to believe that someone at some point said that *p*) available to a testimonial recipient—specifically, to a *successful* recipient, of the testimony that *p*? It seems clear that it is. We can stipulate that the character in Neta’s case has testimonial knowledge or warranted belief that Washington DC is the capital of the US; on the face of it, that presents no obstacle at all to her also having a priori warrant—of the sort we’ve sketched—for believing that someone at some point said this.

The crucial question, however, is whether that a priori warrant could be *explanatory* of her testimonial warrant or knowledge: whether it’s possible to be a successful recipient of the testimony that *p* in part *because of*, or *in virtue of*, the fact that one has the proffered type of a priori warrant for believing that someone at some point said that *p*. And the answer to that question seems to be ‘no’. Not because we can’t testify to ourselves—arguably, we can—but, first, because the (a priori) warrant to believe that someone at some point said that *p* would at best be idle in the explanation: all the work would be done by the agent’s (a priori) warrant to believe that *she*, or *her source*, said that *p*. Bracketing exegetical concerns, that’s all well and good; we could simply regard Neta’s proposal as an answer to the question how the u-entitlement could be a priori—if it’s a warrant to believe a proposition about what’s said of the *specific* type: that one’s source said that *p*. But, furthermore, it’s not clear that the warrant or knowledge that would be explained, in the most favorable scenario, qualifies as *testimonial* warrant or knowledge: it lacks a certain pattern of undermining defeaters that seems to be characteristic of testimony.

## 2.2 Testifying To Oneself?

Suppose you dust off my old diary, and read what I wrote twenty years ago. Presumably you could, by doing so, acquire new or more testimonial knowledge of—or warrant for believing—any number of things about my past. Likewise, it seems, if *I* dust off my old diary, and read what I wrote back then. I mustn’t mistake the diary for a piece of fiction, or have doubts or reasons to doubt the author’s sincerity, and so on. But all of that, of course, goes for you as well (in the scenario where you’re the one who reads it). The fact that I’m the author doesn’t, by itself, seem to make a relevant (negative) difference; nor does it seem to make a difference that—as we may further suppose—I believe, or even know, that I am.

For another, even more mundane, *prima facie* example of what I’ll call ‘self-testimony’, consider a case of the familiar sort in which you consult the to-do-list, or the recorded voice-message, that your past self composed to aid your memory: to help you remember that *p*. On the face of it, there are circumstances where this procedure, too—the consultation of your own reminder—provides you with knowledge or warranted belief that *p*: knowledge or warrant by (your own) testimony.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I gloss over differences in the requirements for (testimonial) warrant and knowledge. Nothing turns on this.

There's no need to suppose that the agent, in a case like this, has *a priori* warrant for believing that someone at some point said that *p*—or, for that matter, for believing she in particular did. It's perfectly *possible* that she has some such warrant (on present assumptions about introspection, and the permissive conception of sayings). But we needn't imagine the example in that way, to make it plausible that the agent has knowledge of or warrant for believing that *p*, and that that warrant or knowledge is (self-) testimonial. It does, indeed, seem necessary to imagine it such a way that she has warrant—*some* warrant—for believing that her source said that *p*. On the obvious reading of the case, however, she has that: she has a posteriori warrant of the usual kind—the kind that's available to potential testimonial recipients other than herself. It's a warrant that owes some of its 'justificatory force' to her experience of a specific utterance—here, an utterance made (or apparently made) by her past self. The exact details do not matter.

But perhaps there are other cases—other *prima facie* instances of warrant or knowledge by self-testimony—in which the corresponding *a priori* warrant does play a crucial role? Suppose you forgot all (external) reminders at home, but that a little introspection reveals that you're thinking of it as true—that you consciously believe—that *p*. Could this procedure, too—the 'inner' consultation of your own belief, as it were—issue knowledge of, or warranted belief, that *p*? Specifically, could your introspective evidence that you already believe that *p* be a reason for you to (continue) to believe that very proposition? Indeed, it seems plausible that it could. Of course various additional requirements must be satisfied—here, as in the previous examples—but even on fairly demanding views of what those requirements are, it looks like the case could be realized in such a way that they're met.<sup>32</sup> (Perhaps you have, or have evidence that you have, an excellent relevant track record. You might even have divine testimony of reliability in your beliefs on the topic. Or perhaps *p*'s truth is part of the best available explanation of why you believe it.)

But would the warrant or knowledge that you'd have, in a suitable realization of the case, be *testimonial*? And if not, why not?

The act of saying, telling, or testifying—the type of communicative act that's supposed to be the source of distinctively testimonial warrant and knowledge—often receives an initial gloss that precludes this: a gloss that stipulates the act to involve linguistic or other overt behavior. (Burge is a notable exception here.) Occasionally it's also part of the initial gloss that source and recipient are distinct (and/or take one another to be distinct); if that's correct, then even our first two—seemingly straightforward—examples of self-testimony are in question: the diary-case and the reminder-case.<sup>33</sup> But it's unclear whether any such restriction deserves to be treated as final word. Indeed, it's unclear how to approach the matter: what the proper methodology is. I take it that it shouldn't be settled by fiat. Substantial issues might hinge on the classification of our three examples—and, more generally, on the demarcation of the subject matter. Perhaps the

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<sup>32</sup> *Pace* some versions of the 'reflection principle' (van Fraassen 1984). The intuitive considerations I offer here don't yet amount to—and aren't meant as—an *argument* against that principle. But, for that, see e.g. Arntzenius 2003; Christensen 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Certain permutations may survive, of course. (This won't matter here.) Examples of each type of gloss can be found in Matilal & Chakrabarti 1994; Lackey & Sosa 2006.

best theoretical framework—our best, future, overall epistemology—will assimilate all three examples to canonical cases of warrant or knowledge by testimony; perhaps only one of them, or none. Perhaps it'll offer alternate groupings, depending on the questions asked. (There might, of course, be reasons to close off some options in advance. At present I'm just questioning the advisability of doing it by stipulation.)

So, how proceed? One approach is to directly investigate the nature or 'metaphysics' of testimony (and of what it is to testify), in abstraction from epistemological concerns—perhaps by reflecting on a range of specific examples of different communicative acts and behaviors, and consider which of them intuitively count as testimony. (There are some attempts at this in the literature.<sup>34</sup>) However, I doubt that any, suitably general, questions about the metaphysics of testimony are fruitfully pursued in isolation from questions about its epistemology—in particular, that we can make progress with the classification of hard cases in this way. The strategy (at least as carried out to date) appears to presuppose that there's a determinate notion of testimony—or, more specifically, of 'natural' or 'informal' testimony (Coady 1992; Lackey 2006)—a notion that we have a firm, *independent* grasp on, and that maps on to the right domain: testimony as a source of a distinctive type of warrant and knowledge. But why think so?<sup>35</sup>

What I propose, instead, is to focus on paradigm cases of testimonial warrant/knowledge, and to seize on a notable—recognizably *epistemic*—feature that they all seem to share: a feature that can be acknowledged without appeal or commitment to any particular theory of the epistemology of testimony. The specific feature that I have in mind is a certain defeater-structure—*viz.* a characteristic pattern among the kinds of first-order consideration that are able to constitute (normative) 'underminers'.<sup>36</sup> On the working hypothesis that this isn't an accident—but that the shared pattern either is, or reflects some property that is, part of what sets testimonial warrant/knowledge apart from warrant/knowledge of other kinds—we can make some progress with the present issue.<sup>37</sup>

Canonical testimonial warrant and knowledge is potentially undermined by at least three distinct kinds of considerations: evidence that the source is *incompetent* (say, that her belief in the content she asserts is false, and/or unreliably generated or sustained); evidence that she's *insincere* (say, that she's lying or acting); and evidence of relevant *communication-failure* (say, of misperception or misunderstanding, on the recipient's part, of the source's utterance). These considerations interact in interesting ways, they come in varying degrees of generality, and they take somewhat different form, depending on whether it's warrant or knowledge that's at issue—but none of that matters here.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> E.g. Cullison 2010; Graham 1997; Lackey 2006. (Contrast the approach of Fricker 2006a.)

<sup>35</sup> The notion wouldn't have to be pre-theoretical—and I'm not assuming that. Why think that there's a determinate notion even *within* philosophical discourse that meets these desiderata?

<sup>36</sup> Roughly: defeaters that provide evidence that the method whereby the agent formed, or would form, her belief that *p* isn't a good method—e.g. that it's unreliable. 'Rebutters', in contrast, provide independent reason to disbelieve *p*. (This is rough indeed, but should suffice for our purposes. Cf. Casullo 2003; Pollock 1986.)

<sup>37</sup> The hypothesis isn't, implausibly, that it's *impossible* for non-testimonial warrant/knowledge to exhibit the relevant defeater-pattern; but that doing so is necessary to count as testimonial warrant/knowledge in particular—that it's part of the nature or essence of that epistemic kind.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. evidence concerning the *de facto* source arguably only undermines (testimonial) knowledge, whereas evidence concerning the *apparent* source undermines both warrant and knowledge. For each defeater-type, the



What matters is that, in canonical cases, warrant/knowledge by testimony is vulnerable to all three, broad varieties of undermining defeat. That shouldn't be controversial: everyone—regardless of their theoretical views on the epistemology of testimony—can agree on it.

Now, it seems clear that this goes for the diary-reader's warrant (or knowledge) as well, in our first *prima facie* example of self-testimony: her warrant is potentially undermined by evidence of incompetence, insincerity, and communication-failure—even though she is (and/or thinks that she is) her own source. It's not hard to specify what would constitute such evidence, or to describe specific circumstances where her warrant is indeed defeated by it. (Suppose that, on second read, a crucial phrase seems to have been used ironically, or that she recalls a tendency to brag on certain matters in her entries...) Likewise for our second problem case—in which the agent consults her own reminder—and, indeed, for all others I can think of where the putative recipient's warrant for believing that her source said that *p* is empirical warrant of the usual kind.

The only case that differs is the one that Neta needs: the case where the corresponding warrant is introspective and a priori. Things are arguably the same with respect to evidence of incompetence (in the putative source)—here, manifested as evidence that some or all of one's own, introspectively accessible, beliefs are the product of, say, wishful thinking or drug-abuse. But there seems to be no room for defeaters of the second and third variety. Insincerity and communication-failure requires a certain *vehicle* that just isn't there—nor is rationally taken to be there (with one qualification, to come).

Consider: what would count as evidence that the putative source is (or was) insincere, in testifying that *p*, in cases where *ex hypothesis* she testifies simply by *judging*—consciously believing—that *p*? A belief cannot *be* insincere. It can't even coherently *appear* insincere (to the first person, or anyone else): only the expression of belief can. Attitudes of other types can misleadingly appear to be beliefs (and conversely)—but evidence that some such possibility is realized isn't yet evidence of insincerity in a belief.

Likewise for relevant communication-failure: what would the evidence look like? Evidence of communication-failure that threatens to defeat (here: undermine *or* rebut) an agent's *introspective* warrant to believe that she 'said' that *p*.<sup>39</sup> Canonical testimonial warrant and knowledge is potentially undermined by evidence that one, say, misheard or misinterpreted the utterance by which one's source seemed to say that *p*. But, in the case of interest, there *is* no such utterance; nor is there a gesture, a picture—or, it would seem, any other suitable middleman.

To clarify: the very possibility of communication-failure, here, appears to stand or fall with a certain controversial view of introspection: a view on which our introspective

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evidence may pertain to a single case, to any possible case, or anything in between. And, of course, whether it annuls, or only weakens, the testimonial warrant in question depends on their relative strength.

('Trustworthiness' is sometimes used to cover both sincerity and competence.)

<sup>39</sup> I'm assuming that introspective warrant is defeasible in the first place. (For dissenting voices, see e.g. Alston 1972; Burge 1996.)

access to (the occurrence, content and attitude-type of) our mental states is mediated by access to representational structures—structures that, importantly, require *interpretation*, by the first person, as well as ‘inner’ perception (or independent apprehension of some other kind). Otherwise they couldn’t be misperceived, misunderstood or, it seems, admit of any other recognizable form of communication-failure.

That view has little *prima facie* plausibility. Of course we sometimes ‘think in words’ (or, for that matter: in images, tangibles, or sounds) but it’s unclear whether this phenomenon is of any significance for the epistemology of introspection—and, even if it is, note that it doesn’t seem possible to *fail to understand* those words: to misidentify the content or force of an utterance in inner speech.<sup>40</sup> At most one can misidentify the words, or other symbols, that figure in one’s (inner) utterance—as when, on speaking out loud, one realizes that one wasn’t thinking in the language that one took oneself to be thinking in. (Note also that evidence of such misidentification doesn’t defeat one’s introspective warrant to believe that one is or was thinking such-and-such.)

*Misleading* evidence can undermine too. But once again: what would it consist in? On the face of it, any such evidence would have to include—or operate against the backdrop of—evidence that the controversial view of introspection just outlined is correct. Let’s give our agent that; then perhaps, in light of further details, it could be rational for her to think that relevant communication-failure has indeed occurred—for instance, that she’s misunderstood some crucial inner utterance. (What further details? Apparent expert testimony might suffice.) That, in turn, could arguably undermine her introspective warrant to believe that she said that *p*—and, derivatively, her warrant to believe that *p*.<sup>41</sup>

But if that’s what it takes, it takes too much. It’s not enough to point to cases where the undermining evidence includes a substantive, controversial claim about the etiology of introspection—even granted such cases are possible. They’re too cheap. To a first approximation: for any class of beliefs *c* and method *m*, such that it’s possible to have (sufficient) evidence that one’s *c*-beliefs are formed or sustained at least partly by *m*, there’s a set of possible underminers—a set of first-order considerations that, for anyone who *has* that evidence, are able to constitute undermining defeaters for her. (Defeaters of whatever warrants her *c*-beliefs do, or would, enjoy.) So, to make good on the present suggestion, we need a cleaner example: a cleaner example in which the purportedly testimonial warrant/knowledge is vulnerable to undermining defeat by evidence of communication-failure (and of insincerity and incompetence). I can’t think of one.

I’ve given Neta’s proposal my best shot. The most it can do is help explain a kind of warrant and knowledge that arguably doesn’t qualify as testimonial. Moreover, if it *were* testimonial, it would be *self*-testimonial. The proposal could still be used in a vindication of A Priori Testimony—but it would be a vindication with the somewhat disappointing rider that what makes the thesis true is that a certain kind of self-testimony is sometimes a priori. Finally, what does the explaining of the agent’s warrant or knowledge, in the most favorable case, is her a priori warrant to believe that she, or her source, said that *p*—at no

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<sup>40</sup> But cf. Byrne 2005. (The point is orthogonal to whether we—also, always—think in a language-of-thought.)

<sup>41</sup> A parallel move might be available for the second type of underminer.

point need her (derivative) a priori warrant to believe that someone at some point said that *p* be mentioned. I haven't even tried to make good on the claim that there are (at least some, actual) cases where she only, somehow, has the latter warrant—and partly on that basis knows that *p*.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.

##### 4.1 Enablers vs. Explainers

Let's return to the argument rehearsed in §2.2 (my second criticism of Burge's account). I argued that a successful recipient's empirically warranted belief that her source said that *p* plays a certain epistemic role vis-à-vis her testimonial belief that *p*—that of a ground or base—a role that, on the face of it, can't be reconciled with A Priori Testimony. Pending a reconciliatory story, we're owed a plausible description of a case where it *doesn't* play that role—a case that, nevertheless, instantiates testimonial knowledge. It doesn't look promising to model it on stock examples of reason-independent causation. But it's not clear what the alternative is, once we grant that the recipient's belief about what's said both provides a reason for her to believe that *p*, and partly causally explains that belief.

As stated, the objection assumes that any successful recipient is warranted in believing that her source said that *p*. Can it proceed on the weaker assumption that she has warrant *to* believe or *for* believing this (*viz.* 'propositional' warrant)? On the weaker assumption, it's left open whether her belief about what's said explains her testimonial belief (since it's left open whether she *has* the former). Would it, still, be dubious to suppose that there are cases where the proposition that her source said that *p* isn't among the reasons *for which* she believes that *p*?

Arguably not—at least not on the grounds that it forces a peculiar picture of her mind. For all that's been said, these are simply cases where the causal-explanatory constraint on the basing-relation is violated in a straightforward way: there's no need to invoke anything like deviance. If there's no causal constraint on basing, more must be said of course. But there's nothing inherently problematic about cases of roughly this shape: an agent knows or has warranted belief that *p*; she also has a reason to believe that *q*; *q* is (or would be) a reason for her to believe that *p*; *q* isn't among the reasons for which she believes that *p*. Perhaps the critical type of testimony case is just another case like that?

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<sup>42</sup> Neta also addresses another argument of mine—an argument strictly aimed at the idea that the u-entitlement (just like the r-entitlement) is a warrant to believe that *p* (*ibid.* 210–1). This idea implies that a recipient can have a priori warrant for believing contents that her source doesn't—indeed *can't*—have a priori warrant to believe. And that struck me as absurd. I first illustrated the perceived absurdity with a case featuring the content *that it's raining*. Neta complains that that content isn't 'purely conceptual'—i.e. incapable of being intellectually understood (cf. §1.2 above). But I explicitly considered that possibility, later in the text, and went on to give other examples (*ibid.* 224). Neta's main point, however—if I understand him correctly—is that he simply *doesn't* find the implication in question absurd. Now, that's fair enough: as I also recognized (*ibid.* 225), the relevant asymmetry is in any case a consequence of Burge's overall view—it's what explains the expansion of the domain of a priori warrant—and one might just regard it as another (perhaps surprising or interesting) upshot of that view. But, in this paper, I've tried to articulate at least my own unease with this consequence a little better (§1.1). And fortunately not much hinges on treating it as *absurd*; there are other reasons to reject the suggestion this argument was aimed at (*ibid.* 218–9).

Fair enough. The argument is conditional on the stronger assumption (which I have yet to see a compelling counter-example or objection to<sup>43</sup>). However, there's a residual issue crying out for explanation—one that can't be avoided by retreating to the weaker assumption—namely: why would testimonial knowledge/warranted belief that *p* require warrant to believe that one's source said that *p*, if not because testimonial warrant *rests*, in part, on such warrant? (And, if it does, how could it ever be a priori?) If there's another—better—explanation available, it would be good to see what it looks like. Now, if *both* assumptions—strong and weak—are abandoned, that pressure goes away as well. But note that another emerges: to explain the three-prong defeater-pattern that appears to be characteristic of testimonial warrant and knowledge; in particular, the vulnerability to defeat by evidence of insincerity and communication-failure. The assumptions (strong or weak) point to a straightforward explanation of that vulnerability.<sup>44</sup>

Someone who grants the stronger assumption might object to a different premise: the claim that the recipient's belief about what's said plays a causal-*explanatory*—as opposed to causal-*enabling*—role vis-à-vis her testimonial belief. This distinction (too) is hard to explicate, but not to illustrate. For instance: that Bettie has a head is plausibly a causal enabling condition, relative to the explananda that she likes chocolate cake (in a given, ordinary context). It's part of the general background conditions that make this possible, but it doesn't explain, even in part, why or how it happens. (Perhaps it *could* explain it, in other—rather peculiar—circumstances; that doesn't affect the point.)

This distinction is different from—and, it seems, crosscuts—that between warrant-enablers (*viz.* states/conditions in the warrant-enabling role) and warrant-conferrers (*viz.* states/conditions in the warrant-conferring role).<sup>45</sup> Enablers, in the second sense, can be causal explainers, and so far I've been assuming that that's precisely the status that the A Priori Testimony advocate would—and, given their other commitments, should—assign to the successful recipient's belief that her source said that *p*, relative to her belief that *p*. Note that it's indeed what she should say, if she wishes to sustain the analogy with the case of the proof. (Unlike, say, the rotation of the earth, and the absence of too much arsenic in your system, your perception of the written proof *does* partly causally explain you're a priori knowledge of the theorem.) Furthermore, the alternative has no intuitive support at all.

A plausible intuitive mark of a genuine causal enabler is that it's legitimately *taken for*

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<sup>43</sup> There are many variables, and it's hard to construct a clear test case (cf. my 2006, 229–30, esp. n. 66). But extant attempts at counter-examples tend to assume a very stringent conception of belief, and/or of belief-to-belief transitions (see e.g. Burge 1993; Audi 2006; Recanati 2002). Goldberg 2010 assumes an implausible account of the warrant involved (68). Gilbert 1991 argues, on partly empirical grounds, that it's impossible to “understand a proposition without representing it as true” (114). Taken at face value, that's obviously false, since there are world-to-mind directed propositional attitudes (e.g. desires). Taken more charitably—as the claim that belief necessarily precedes disbelief (temporally and/or explanatorily)—it's compatible with everything I'm saying. (At most, however, Gilbert's arguments support the even weaker claim that people are rather gullible.)

<sup>44</sup> The significance of incompetence is also straightforwardly explained, on the overall model I favor (2006, §8).

<sup>45</sup> The standard terminology here is confusing—the same phrase, ‘causal enabler’, is sometimes used to designate enabler-as-opposed-to-justifier, and other times to designate enabler-as-opposed-to-explainer. (And neither distinction maps neatly on to the efficacy/relevance distinction.)

*granted* in a satisfying, causal or other, explanation of the given effect (cf. Bermúdez 1995). We can give a complete (correct) explanation of why Bettie likes chocolate cake, without at any point citing her having a head.<sup>46</sup> A second intuitive mark is that causal enablers tend to stay constant across a large amount of (actual and counterfactual) variation in the effects they enable—presumably that’s *why* they’re legitimately ignored, in the explanation of these effects. (And why they have little, if any, *predictive* force on their own.) Other things equal Bettie would still have a head, whether or not she liked chocolate cake—indeed, whether she had any food preferences whatsoever.

However, the successful recipient’s belief that her source said that *p* isn’t legitimately ignored in a satisfying explanation of her believing that *p* by testimony (under that—the relevant—description). How would the explanation go? It might of course be over-determined that a given recipient believes that *p*, or even that she believes that *p* by testimony, but that’s beside the point: for each testimonial route, the fact that she believes that her source said that *p* is a crucial part of the explanation. Secondly, there’s little reason to think that her belief about what’s said exhibits the constancy of a causal enabler (vis-à-vis significant variation in the purported ‘enablee’): that, other things equal, she’d still believe that her source said that *p*, whether or not she believed that *p*—rather than not-*p*, or *q*, or nothing at all—*by that source’s testimony*. Again, obvious enablers (of her believing that *p* by testimony) include her having a head, and the absence of too much arsenic in her system: these conditions do pass the test.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.3 Fast Track Warrant Preservation

Here’s a final suggestion, on my opponent’s behalf.

“Let’s concede that any successful recipient of testimony that *p* is warranted—empirically warranted—in believing that her source said that *p*, and on that basis empirically warranted in believing that *p*. At least some such recipients are *also* warranted in believing that *p* on independent, a priori grounds. What grounds? Those of her *source*. The source’s warrant sometimes takes the ‘fast track’, alongside the recipient’s empirical grounds for believing the same proposition—it’s robustly preserved in the testimony, status and strength intact. If the source’s warrant a priori, of sufficient strength, and not itself testimonial, the recipient can even come by a priori knowledge that *p* in this way.”

This model—the ‘Fast Track Model’—can be regarded as a (substantial but) friendly amendment to Burge’s account, or as part of an overall competitor; this does not matter. (The model is clearly compatible with many different views of the ‘slow’ track.) It’s a model on which *all-things-considered* testimonial warrant is never a priori, but that’s not a problem *per se*: doxastic warrant, even knowledge, could be over-determined in all the critical cases. The model gives the advocate of A Priori Testimony recourse to the natural

<sup>46</sup> Perhaps there are several correct explanations, at different levels of description; nothing here turns on this.

<sup>47</sup> Interestingly: her (eventual) beliefs that there are other minds, that she’s not a brain-in-a-vat, that she’s not now dreaming, *etc.*, seem to pass the test too—given some obvious restrictions on the value of *p*. But I lack the space to elaborate on the implications of this here.

picture of the recipient's mind outlined in §2.2—with the added proviso that the natural picture isn't always the *whole* picture. Note also that the model doesn't give us 'more than we bargained for' (cf. §1.2): testimony only issues a priori warrant when the source (or, on a slight variation: the source's source...) has a priori, non-testimonial warrant. And in the *absence* of a source, or a source with *warrant*, there's no a priori warrant by testimony to be had, since there's no warrant (of any kind) to be preserved.<sup>48</sup>

But, as it stands, the Fast Track Model is extremely programmatic. And its advocates face two difficult preliminary tasks: to clarify the intended warrant-preservation thesis, and to articulate the mechanism that implements it—the separate mechanism that explains how warrant is indeed preserved, in the intended sense, if and when it is. (The preceding arguments should make it clear why a *separate* mechanism is called for. But surprisingly, that need seems to have been overlooked so far.<sup>49</sup>) In the rest of this essay, I'll focus on the former task, since it would seem necessary to address that first (and precisify the mechanism's job description). Moreover, we hardly have a serious proposal on the table, until the warrant-preservation thesis in question has been clarified.

There's a range of warrant-preservation (or 'transmission') theses in the general vicinity, some of which have been discussed in the recent literature, that *don't* meet the Fast Track Model's needs—including each of the following:

A recipient has warrant for believing that *p*...

- (a) *if and only if* the source has warrant for believing that *p*
- (b) *only if* the source has warrant for believing that *p*
- (c) *if* the source has warrant for believing that *p*
- (d) *if and because* the source has warrant for believing that *p*
- (e) *in some cases* where the source has warrant for believing that *p*

Options (a) through (d) are too weak *and* too strong—at any rate: considerably stronger than the model needs, and arguably too strong to be plausible—whereas (e) is too weak. Each option is too weak, in that it leaves it entirely open whether the recipient's warrant shares any significant features with the source's warrant—notably: that of *being a priori* (or a posteriori, as applicable).

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<sup>48</sup> The model also avoids the undesirable consequence that, unless there's a source, and that source has warrant, there's no testimonial warrant at all—a consequence that seemingly can't be avoided if *all* testimonial warrant is explained in terms of warrant-preservation. (For a bold endorsement, see Owens 2006, 16.)

<sup>49</sup> Not just by Burge, but e.g. by Faulkner 2000, Moran 2006, Owens 2006, Schmitt 2006—each of whom advocates a warrant-preservation thesis of roughly the kind the model requires. Lawlor 2002 notes the need, as well as the corresponding need in an account of warrant-preservation by *memory*; she argues that it can be met in the latter case, but not in the former. However, the mechanism Lawlor describes at most explains the preservation of *content* by memory—but content-preservation isn't sufficient for warrant-preservation, and arguably not necessary either. (Goldberg 2010 specifies a mechanism of sort. See my 2012 for objections.)

What the Fast Track Model needs is a thesis of roughly the following form:

*A successful* recipient has warrant *of type w* for believing that *p*...

(f) *if* (alt. *and because*) the source has warrant of type *w* for believing that *p*

(g) *in some cases* where the source has warrant of type *w* for believing that *p*

The restriction to *successful* recipients allows us to say that the other—the unavoidably empirical—strand of any all-things-considered testimonial warrant doesn't stand or fall with the source's warrant. And, furthermore, both (f) and (g) build in that, when warrant is preserved, the recipient has the *same* warrant (type) as the source.

On the intended interpretation, warrants are rather finely individuated, but not *too* finely: not so finely that two distinct subjects are unable to share warrants, and not so broadly that two warrants of the same type can differ in their status as a priori or as a posteriori. (Nor in strength—at least not too much—lest the explanation of a priori testimonial *knowledge* fall through.) Now: what's that way? Can anything more informative be said about it?

Perhaps, on the intended reading, warrants are just carved in whatever way they're carved for it to be possible to pass on one's warrant to another agent in the *usual*—seemingly un-mysterious—way: by *facilitating her access* to it. I can pass you my (a priori) warrant for believing a certain logical theorem, by guiding you through the proof—or perhaps, on suitable assumptions about your motivation and ability, simply by informing you that there *is* a proof, and leaving you to it. Likewise, I can share my (a posteriori) warrant for believing that Bettie likes chocolate cake, by telling you that she eats it every day and claims to like it—or perhaps by pointing over at Bettie (fully occupied eating cake).

Whatever the precise structure of my warrant, and however exactly that structure differs from that of relevantly different warrant types, there's an intuitive sense in which I'm able to pass on my warrant—and share it with you—in examples like these. And when a warrant is shared in this familiar way, then, other things equal, it doesn't lose its a priori/a posteriori status 'in transfer'. Provided you pick up on the right warrant—the warrant I attempt to share—and you lack defeaters (and status-affecting defeater-defeaters), the warrant you have as a result of our interaction is a priori if mine is, and a posteriori if mine is. The same goes, it seems, for relative strength: other things equal, our warrants will match in that respect too. (The status and strength of our all-things-considered warrants may, of course, differ—but that, too, is as it should be.)

Let's call this phenomenon 'facilitating warrant-sharing.' It might be tempting to use it as the blueprint—the blueprint for further explication of the warrant-preservation thesis that's at the heart of the Fast Track Model. Since we have an intuitive, independent grasp of facilitating warrant-sharing—and so, presumably, of the individuation conditions for warrant types that's implicit in it—it might be tempting to invoke it here. Note also how very plausible it is that, in facilitating warrant-sharing, one's experiences of the other

agent's utterance, of specific features of the conversational context, *etc.*, play a triggering role (vis-à-vis the warrant one has as a result). So perhaps, if this model holds up, the possibility of a priori testimonial warrant can after all be explained with appeal to the proof case analogy?

However, there's a problem right upfront: in facilitating warrant-sharing, *too many* features of the original warrant seem to survive the transfer from one agent to the next—too many for it to be a suitable blueprint. In particular: actual and potential *defeaters* survive—including underminers (at all levels of grain). Other things equal, the warrant that you have, after I guide you through the proof, or alert you to cake-eating Bettie, is vulnerable to exactly the same undermining defeaters as my warrant is: if evidence that Bettie suffers from *bulimia nervosa* potentially undermines my warrant for believing that she likes chocolate cake, it potentially undermines yours; if evidence that the ostensible proof we worked through contains a serious but elusive fallacy potentially undermines my warrant for believing the theorem, it potentially undermines yours—and so on.

But these defeater-patterns *don't* survive the transfer of warrant that supposedly takes place in testimony. To see this, suppose that you and I are warranted in believing the same proposition—say, that many children have imaginary friends—by the testimony of two different sources: Max and Bettie respectively. Our sources are warranted in their beliefs, in turn, but by different methods: Max's warrant partly rests on (independent) warrant to believe that this was confirmed by a recent global study; Bettie's warrant partly rests on warrant to believe that *Where the Wild Things Are* is hugely popular. Presumably, the example can be elaborated in such a way that our (*i.e.* the recipients') epistemic situations don't differ in any (other) relevant respects—say, with respect to what we believe, or have reason to believe, about our sources' warrants.

On the proposed gloss, the warrant-preservation thesis under consideration implies that our respective testimonial warrants would, nevertheless, have starkly different defeater-structures: not just different in that your warrant (and not mine) is potentially undermined by evidence that *Max's* utterance was insincere, that *Max* is incompetent, *etc.*—but in that your warrant (and not mine) is potentially undermined by evidence that the study Max relies on has serious methodological flaws, or has been disconfirmed by other studies in the interim, *etc.* Conversely, of course, for my warrant and Bettie's: other things equal, my warrant inherits the defeater-pattern that's associated with hers. But that's very implausible.<sup>50</sup> (And the choice between (f) and (g) makes no relevant difference. Against (g): just add whatever condition's supposed to be missing, for the case to be one where warrant is indeed preserved; then, again, consider the upshot for the distribution of defeaters.)

If this is right, then warrants, as they figure in the warrant-preservation thesis that the

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<sup>50</sup> If there's asymmetry in strength between our sources' warrants, the thesis also implies that we're warranted to different degrees. That, too, seems to me unacceptable. But it's a consequence the Fast Track Model is *supposed* to have. If anything, then, this is the basis for a different objection. (And intuitions about strength seem to vary considerably; see e.g. Gerken 2011; Goldberg 2012.) For examples similar to mine, see Gerken, *ibid.*; McDowell 1994.



Fast Track Model needs, aren't individuated in whatever way warrants are individuated in facilitating warrant-sharing. (Or they are, and the view is a non-starter.) But how, then, *are* they individuated? Without an informative answer to that question, the warrant-preservation thesis—and with it the Fast Track Model—is simply too programmatic to deserve our confidence.<sup>51</sup>

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